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Maoist Social Experiments in China, 1969

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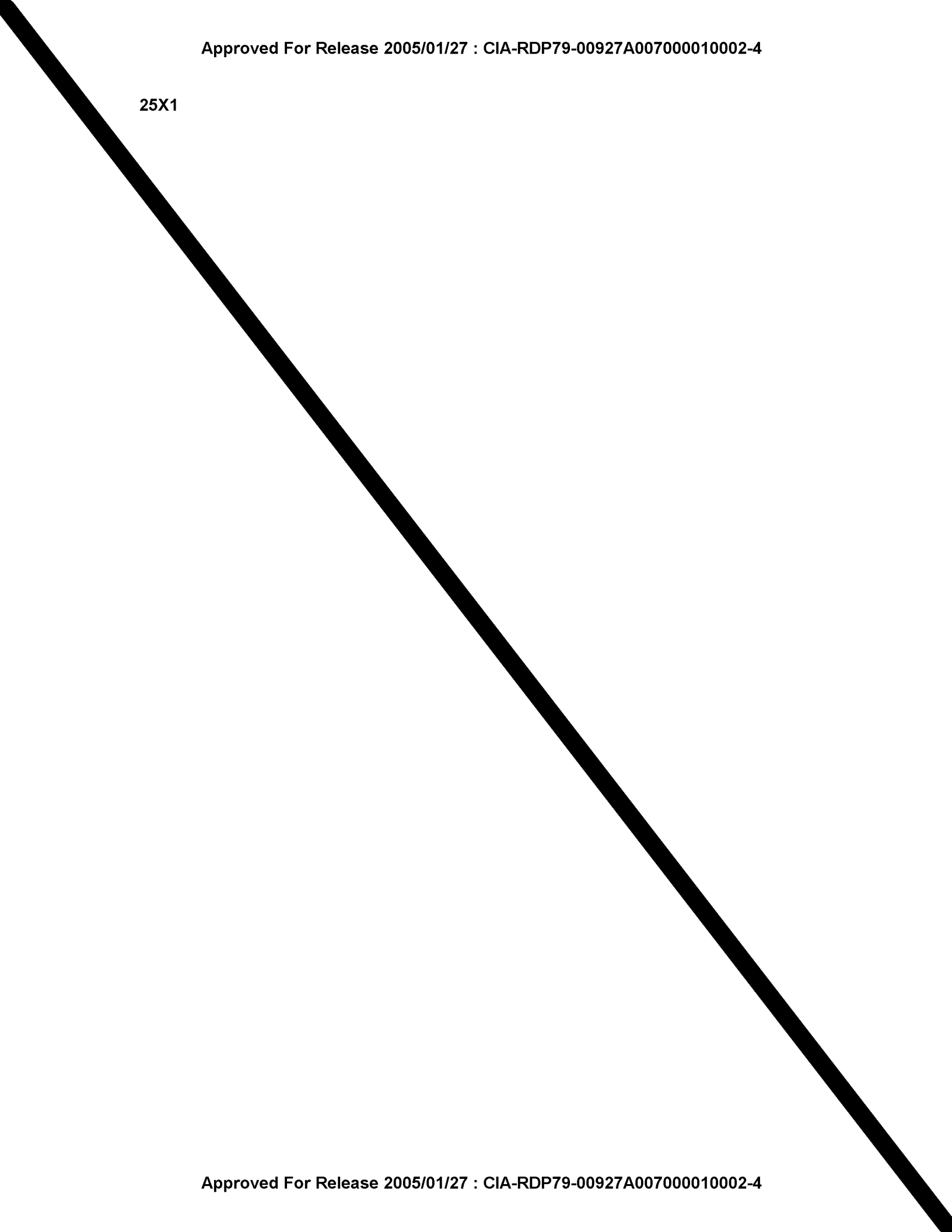


MAOIST SOCIAL EXPERIMENTS IN CHINA, 1969

Since summer, 1968, considerable progress has been made in restoring order and moving the Cultural Revolution into a "constructive" phase. The era of Red Guard violence is over, and although a low level of disorder and political tension persists in the provinces, the military have imposed firm rule on most of the country. Mao Tse-tung has successfully purged the Chinese Communist Party of the major figures he believed were opposing him. The new leadership around him is about to convene a party congress to adopt a new party constitution and to form a new politburo and central committee which will reflect the power structure that has emerged from the Cultural Revolution. These, however, are merely the formal objectives of the congress. Real progress in restoring stability and order may continue to be slow in view of the staggering problems facing Peking.

The Chinese leaders still have far to go to repair the damage wrought by the Cultural Revolution, and their effectiveness continues to be inhibited by turbulent behind-the-scenes politics. Political jockeying is particularly apparent in the provinces, where factional struggles among leaders still hinder consolidation of the new governing units that have been set up in China's 29 provinces. While preparing for the forthcoming ninth party congress, the elite in Peking have put on an outward display of unity, but there are probably still divisions over both power and policy issues. These continuing divisions make it unclear what decisions the congress will reach or what policy guidelines it will formulate.

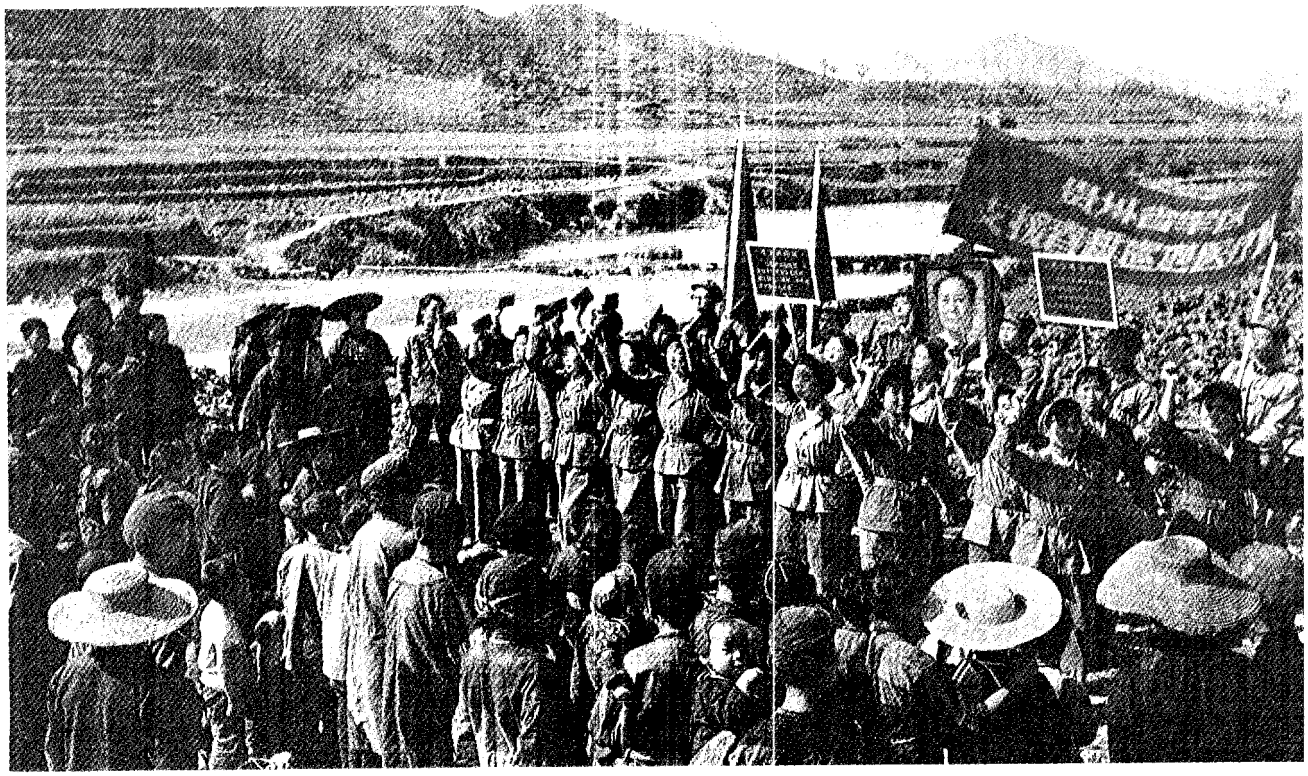
One of the major divisive issues probably is how far to go in pushing the socioeconomic policies and mass campaigns Mao believes are necessary to promote his unique vision of a selfless, egalitarian, and "revolutionary" China. These include rural reforms, population transfers, changes in education, purge efforts, and changes in administrative structure. Similar measures were pushed during the Great Leap Forward and again in 1963-65, often with ruinous results. Nevertheless, Mao seems determined to continue his experimentation, and this may represent his price for closing out the Cultural Revolution.

REVOLUTIONARY VISION

Socialist society is a fairly long historical stage. During this stage of history, classes, class contradictions, and class struggle continue, the struggle between the road of socialism and the road of capitalism goes on, and the danger of capitalist restoration remains. (Red Flag, 20 June 1967)

The various social and economic experiments which have been under way since the summer of 1968 bear the unmistakable stamp of Mao Tse-tung. In essence, they involve an effort to transform China's society and economy to fulfill Mao's ideals—presumably the object for which the political battles of the Cultural Revolution were fought. Among the wide range of complex factors contributing to that upheaval was Mao's growing belief that his conception of a "new China" had been steadily losing ground since the debacle of his Great Leap Forward in 1958.

After the Great Leap failed, Mao apparently posited an almost indefinite timetable for the "complete victory of socialism" in China. He saw the development of socialist society as a process of uninterrupted revolution, and the important question for him was how to sustain revolutionary momentum for perhaps five or six generations. His answer was that the success of the



Chairman Mao instructs us: "As long as there are men, we can perform any kind of miracle in the world."

revolution could be assured only if men could be remolded into true believers. In his view, remaking men is the really crucial task of the revolution—more essential, even, than institutional change, technical and scientific modernization, or rapid industrialization.

Mao did not lose all grasp of China's practical problems, but the evidence is that his thinking became increasingly colored by revolutionary romanticism. While the regime pursued policies of social and economic retrenchment to recover from the disasters of the Great Leap, Mao became progressively obsessed with the belief that Soviet-style "revisionism" was spreading and undermining his revolutionary accomplishments. He feared that the revolutionary elan the leaders had fostered in the party and society as a whole would gradually weaken, that there would be pressures to moderate the harshness of political dictatorship, and that private, personal interests and enterprise would motivate China's masses more than abstract virtue or long-range collectivist goals. Mao believed that the period of recovery in the early 1960s accentuated such trends, and his reaction was to renew the emphasis on programs emphasizing austerity, self-sacrifice, and ideological purity. At the same time he was developing a growing and probably well-founded suspicion that many officials, and probably some members of his inner circle, did not share his faith in permanent revolution. This suspicion became a principal factor in triggering the Cultural Revolution.

During the violent struggles of 1966-1968, Mao's concern with maintaining revolutionary fervor was evident, but in the heat of battle, few initiatives were taken to implement many of his pet socioeconomic projects. As the leadership finally moved to curb widespread factional violence last summer, Peking began issuing reform directives in Mao's name. These in turn paved the way for launching in the fall a series of mass campaigns and social experiments which suggest that the Maoists are as determined as ever to make Chinese society more egalitarian and more "revolutionary"—regardless of the cost. Within the past six months, a clearer picture has emerged of the course on which the 75-year-old Mao hopes to set China's development before he passes from the scene.

SOCIOECONOMIC EXPERIMENTS, 1969

By the beginning of the new year, it was clear that the campaigns under way on a national scale were designed to resume the pressures for greater socialization that had been largely suspended during the Cultural Revolution. The various programs identified to date include: 1) a campaign to simplify administration, 2) dispersing huge numbers of city dwellers to the countryside, 3) dispatching more medical personnel to rural areas, 4) reform of education, 5) reforms of the rural wage system, 6) changes in basic commune institutions, 7) "re-education" of intellectuals, and 8) an extensive campaign to clean out "class enemies"—a broad category of former landlords, ex-party cadres, recalcitrant commune leaders, and other political undesirables. The experiments have mushroomed since last fall, but local variations are substantial, suggesting that national policy is still vague and tentative.

A firm determination of how much additional impetus the experiments will receive may not be possible until the ninth congress. At present, social and economic policies are probably being debated behind the scenes. There was some evidence of this in Peking's most recent pronouncement on economic policy on 21 February. Although heavily encrusted in standard Maoist slogans, that statement called essentially for a more reasoned, systematic management of industrial and agricultural production. This statement may, however, reflect only one side in a

Passing on production techniques to commune members to spur the development of collective economy.

Picture and Caption - China Pictorial No. 7, 1968

continuing debate, since no moderation of Maoist measures has been noted. There is little doubt, however, that moderate elements in the regime are disturbed because Maoist reforms make it difficult to operate the economy effectively, to restore the cohesion of the state, and to maintain the degree of law and order necessary for a return to stability.

RURAL REFORMS

China's vast peasant population, for example, has to bear increasingly heavy burdens as the result of being on the receiving end of most of the current campaigns. In recent months there have been numerous reports of curbs against the remaining private sector in the rural economy, which has provided peasants with a significant portion of their household income since 1961 There is also evidence of steps to increase the authority of production brigades in the commune structure while reducing that of the lower level production teams, which had been the basic

In order to promote a big leap forward in agriculture, it is necessary to let revolution take command and put the factor of men in the first place, shatter the revisionist line advocating 'material incentives,' foster the idea of farming for the sake of revolution, smash the idea of simply relying on the state and foster the revolutionary spirit of working hard. (Harbin Radio, 1 March 1969)

agricultural planning and accounting units.

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The merging of richer and poorer localities will tend to reduce the income—and incentive to work—of the more enterprising peasants and production teams. Another scheme being experimentally implemented, the so-called Tachai work-point system, seeks to narrow rural income differentials and reduce the role of material incentives in favor of more political inspiration. A peasant would be paid his points for a day's labor on the basis of the correctness of his political attitudes as well as what he has produced.

Other programs, such as new health and educational reforms, place additional burdens on the production brigades. Under a newly announced medical care system, the individual contributes a token sum toward maintaining health services, while the brigade picks up the bulk of the cost. Brigades are also taking over the direction and most of the financing of former state-run primary schools. In these two programs, the state saves money, but ultimately the peasant bears a greater cost because his individual share of the collective income will be sharply reduced.

It is still uncertain whether the current experimentation will result in a "new" system for the communes—the largest administrative and economic units in rural China.

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grains. There are some signs that the Maoists are again seeking to promote the communes as self-sufficient agricultural and industrial units in a manner faintly reminiscent of the Great Leap period when communes were first introduced. In some areas there is also a push to increase the self-sufficiency of communes by increasing peasant manufacture of farm tools and expanding brigade-run "factories." The heavy stress in recent propaganda on the need for training "new style agrotechnicians" and workers capable of both industrial and agricultural jobs also implies that communes will be expected to rely less on the state and more on themselves for basic goods and services.

There is mounting evidence that the amalgamation of production teams and the efforts to establish a new commune system are meeting strong peasant resistance. In recent weeks other reports have suggested that these institutional changes are being accompanied by a campaign, in South China at least, to replace entrenched rural cadres. Presumably this effort is aimed at creating a more activist and responsive rural leadership.

FORCED EMIGRATION

> *Tempered in the struggles of the great proletarian cultural revolution, town dwellers long divorced from labour, have raised their socialist consciousness greatly. They have come to understand that taking no part in productive labour puts burdens on the state and is not conducive to the nation's socialist construction, nor to reducing the differences between town and countryside, nor to remoulding their thinking or that of their children. (Peking NCNA, 21 December 1968)*

The strains in the countryside have been greatly increased by large-scale transfers of urban dwellers—perhaps as many as 20 million—to rural areas to share work and hardships with the farmers. This crash program was begun last fall with the limited objective of bringing under control unruly students and factionalists by assigning them to agricultural labor. Since October, the program has broadened to include underemployed

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adult city residents and their dependents, professional people, administrative and technical cadres, and in some cases, even skilled workers. There are propaganda claims that as much as one fourth of the population of some cities has been sent to labor in farming and mining communities for an indefinite period.

Peking propaganda asserts that this dispersal eases the urban unemployment and food situation, but, in fact, it merely transfers these problems to already overpopulated rural communities. There have been numerous reports of the additional burden of feeding these people, of the inability and unwillingness of urban emigrants to adjust to rural life, and of violent clashes between the newcomers and their reluctant hosts. The forced emigration confronts already harassed provincial authorities with serious administrative problems and adds to the burden of maintaining public order. [redacted] in some communes [redacted] troops are being permanently assigned to keep people in line.

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The dispersal to the countryside is also highly unpopular in urban areas. The disruption of family and work life, the lower standards of rural living, and the prospect of a lengthy rustication have increased the personal insecurity of city residents and sparked both covert and overt forms of resistance. Recent provincial broadcasts emphasizing "war preparedness" and the revival of the old "liberate Taiwan" theme also suggest that local officials are casting about for a justification of the dispersions to counter growing public disaffection. Apparently urban officials responsible for public security are becoming increasingly concerned over unauthorized flights back to the cities by emigrants who are dissatisfied enough to run the risk of stiff prison sentences should they be caught. [redacted] the returnees to one city were so numerous that they form a new "criminal" underground.

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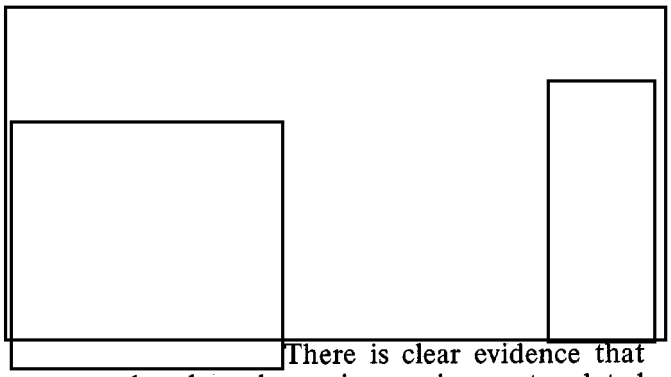
CADRE LABOR

> *Sending the masses of cadres to do manual work gives them an excellent opportunity to study once again; this should be done by all cadres except those who are too old, weak, ill or disabled. Those who are not working as cadres also should go in groups to do manual work. (Peking Radio, 4 October 1968)*

The transfer to the countryside of large numbers of China's urban cadres—officials who manage industry and coordinate the economy—reinforces the notion that the Maoists' effort is not aimed at economic and social rationalization but at social transformation. To serve the overriding goal of maintaining revolutionary fervor and creating a truly egalitarian society, the distinctions between town and countryside, between leaders and led, must be eliminated. There must be "better troops and simpler administration" and special efforts must be made to prevent the growth of a privileged bureaucratic ruling group. Consequently, administrative organs and factories have been ordered to make wholesale transfers of personnel from managerial and technical staffs to positions where they work with their hands, in effect, to a sort of forced labor camp.



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There is clear evidence that some cadres have been given assignments related to their skills, and temporarily, at least, most cadres may still draw their regular salaries. Many

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25X1 reports to date, however, suggest that the majority are subjected to strenuous living conditions, heavy manual labor, and large doses of political study. [redacted] 25X1

Before starting labor, leading comrades (front) of the Revolutionary Committee of the "May 7" Cadre School study Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-tung together with the students.

Picture and Caption - China Pictorial No. 1, 1969

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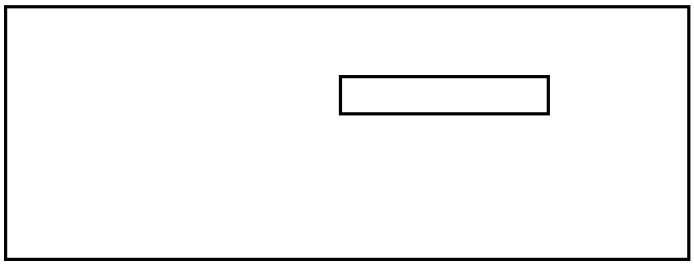

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Retrenchment and eviction from urban areas has sharply undermined cadre morale and built up a reservoir of resentment, disillusionment, and insecurity. This attitude has not been helped by additional injunctions to senior cadres to send their children to rural areas. In an apparent effort to forestall mounting cadre criticism of the program, People's Daily of 16 January made rare mention of the fact that Mao had once sent his own son, Mao An-ying, to attend a "labor university" in the countryside in 1945 (An-ying had just returned from a school in the USSR). The obvious implication was that truly revolutionary cadres should be only too glad to follow his example.

REVOLUTION IN EDUCATION

> *Over the past 19 years, students of philosophy, literature, economics, and history have failed to change their ideology because they did not go to the masses of workers and peasants. So it is better for us to send them to work in the factories and on the farms. After a period during which they are subjected to criticism and struggled against by the masses, they will sincerely integrate themselves with the workers and peasants, thus ending their alienation from the masses. Is there anything wrong with this approach? (Wen Hui Pao, 21 December 1968)*

Other key groups that are being asked to follow Mao's prescriptions for a new China, and are suffering consequent disillusionment and loss of social position, are teachers and the 1966, 1967, and 1968 "graduates" of middle schools and universities. Over the past six months, the future of most has become highly uncertain as they have been caught up in a Maoist revolution in education aimed at breaking the hold of "bourgeois intellectuals" on China's future generations.

[redacted] classes will remain suspended in universities for the next two or three years, and all teachers are to be sent to teach in farming villages. It is apparent that no meaningful education is currently being conducted above the primary school level, and the debate on educational reform begun last summer is still going on.

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Since mid-September, 1968, central propaganda media have been publicizing selected local level experiments in schooling as models for educational reform. The main features of the reforms now being publicized generally follow the desiderata laid down at the beginning of the Cultural Revolution: eliminating "bourgeois" control over the schools; easing entrance requirements for children of workers and poorer peasants; and "reforming" the system of teaching, teaching materials, and the grading system. A new element is the emphasis on decentralization and efforts to minimize central government expenditures. Another innovation is that over-all direction of the schools is to be taken out of the hands of professional educators and entrusted to committees of workers and peasants.

In the rural areas the financing and staffing of schools are in the hands of village-level organizations. In the towns these functions have fallen to local factory and residents' committees—a development which is likely to result in a serious lowering of educational standards. In rural areas the trend is toward the amalgamation of primary and secondary schools, and in urban centers, toward a reduction of schooling below college level

from 12 to 9 years. At present, it seems that truncated secondary schools will remain intact in the cities, but in the countryside it appears that the former two-year agricultural middle schools will be tacked on to the primary schools to provide peasant youth with what amounts to seven years of education. While the ultimate fate of professional teachers is being debated, many are being sent to labor in rural areas and their places taken by semiliterate peasants and workers.

At this stage, the new system appears to be primarily an expression of Mao's "leveling" tendencies, and the net result is likely to be a regression in higher education in China—particularly since the content of education in the new system has been so strongly diluted. The model experiments described to date place heavy emphasis on ideological and basic practical training and very little on academic, technical, or advanced training. A model school for agrotechnicians in Kiangsu, for example, was recently praised because most teaching was done while the students actually worked at farm tasks, and grading had been eliminated in favor of rating students on Mao's thought. Secondary education now is supposed to consist almost entirely of manual labor and the study of basic farm or factory practices, with a minuscule amount of academic work thrown in.

Graduating students, however, are expected to be something more than good laborers. They are also supposed to be "activists in the living study and application of Chairman Mao's thought." This commitment to political activism is clearly a major goal of the new education. Although it is true that Chinese Communist schooling has always emphasized ideology and indoctrination, the present reduction in academic work is unusually drastic.

Here revolutionary teachers and students work side by side with the poor and lower-middle peasants. Taking part in collective productive labor is the basic course for both teachers and students.

Picture and Caption - China Pictorial No. 2, 1969

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At the lower levels the Maoist experiments in education are designed to produce large numbers of politically reliable vocational youth, who will receive at most seven years of education in rural areas and nine to ten in cities. The proposed system ignores the requirement of preparing students for university. This does not seem to bother the Maoists, whose notions about higher education are impractical. According to recent proposals, which apparently are not to be acted upon for some time, however, universities will shorten their courses to two or three years and recruit their student body from politically reliable peasants and workers.

At this stage, there is serious doubt that any form of higher education will be resumed soon. Universities and even some scientific research institutes—except for those directly run by the army—are still closed, and there are no signs of plans to reopen them. There is also no reliable evidence that a large new class of politically qualified laborers and military men is being prepared to enter into advanced training. As a result, it is highly likely that China will suffer serious shortages of personnel trained in the modern techniques that its long-term development requires.

This problem is compounded because only limited efforts are being made to employ productively those 1967-1968 "graduates" whose schooling was terminated by the Cultural Revolution. At present, nearly all of them must work as peasants or in factories for at least one to two years. Apparently even some "graduates" in critical fields, such as physics, chemistry, and mathematics are thus employed.

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[redacted]

[redacted] In recent months there has been some evidence of a concerted effort to give 1966 technical graduates—those who completed their full schooling—job assignments related to their training. Presumably even greater care will be taken in the future to obtain appropriate jobs for the products of the new university system. At this juncture, however, most graduates are still being assigned to ordinary labor in farms, factories, and mines, or are being sent to reclaim wasteland in remote border regions [redacted]

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THE HIGH COST OF REFORM

> *Some people have argued this way: "If doing a good job in revolution can raise production, then it can also be said that doing a good job in production means doing a good job in revolution." This is a type of logic which reverses right and wrong. It is a fallacy to say that revolution must show results in production. (Kiangsi Daily, 23 February 1969)*

Maoist social experiments have already imposed a heavy burden on the nation. Unless their more extreme aspects are blunted, they are likely to undermine any constructive efforts to initiate long-range programs of development. The Maoists, of course, offer a variety of rationalizations and justifications for their programs. In general, these "reforms" are somehow supposed to "unleash" enthusiasm and energy. Forced emigration to the countryside is supposed to ease overcrowding in the cities and the retrenchment of cadres is supposed to break bureaucratic bottlenecks and simplify administration. Educational reforms are supposed to make schooling more egalitarian, more responsive to practical needs,

and available to more people, especially in rural China. The transfer of large numbers of medical personnel to the countryside is supposed to meet the never before achieved goal of adequate health services for the majority of the country's population.

Such arguments all express legitimate concerns, but on balance the thrust of the programs in their present form appears far more negative and destructive than positive. This is immediately apparent in such programs as the forced exodus to the countryside. Millions of people are being thrust upon the communes to be "re-educated" by peasants who are already hard pressed. Furthermore, there is little likelihood that hordes of unskilled city dwellers can make a significant contribution to increasing agricultural production. The possibilities of social disorder in such an experiment are obvious, and even if the present campaign is temporary, it will leave a legacy of bitterness and disillusionment.

The retrenchment of technical and administrative cadres is another program that seems to serve little rational purpose. It will make operating the economy more difficult and probably further reduce industrial productivity. Moreover, thinning the ranks of both provincial level and central ministry personnel on the scale that is probably occurring will reduce Peking's ability to administer a nation of over 800 million people.

The high cost of some other Maoist programs may seem less obvious. The resumption of any education at all after two years of upheaval, for example, appears to be a plus. The continuation of what amounts to an agricultural middle school in the countryside and the reliance on half-study half-work programs in both rural and urban areas is an economical approach and does serve to give larger numbers of both adults and young people some form of education. A legitimate question, however, is how much more practical training China's agricultural and industrial workers need to acquire. While some of the Maoists' educational goals may be useful in maintaining an essentially primitive economy, they are unlikely to meet China's current and future educational needs, especially the need for skilled technicians, scientists, engineers, managers, and educators.

Even though Mao recognizes the necessity of scientific and technical colleges, his call to return their graduates to "labor" after two to three years casts doubt on his understanding of advanced training. Communist China badly needs rapid development in the technical and managerial fields, but Maoist prescriptions for higher education—with their calculated anti-intellectualism and systematic denigration of teachers and theoretical studies—seem designed to deny China some of the tools of modernization. Formal scientific and technical training and probably much of the research and development work outside of advanced weapons programs have already been seriously curtailed as a result of the Cultural Revolution. This shows that the Maoists will make major sacrifices to achieve domestic political and social goals by halting activities which even they regard as vital to making China a great power.

One further example serves to point up the Maoists' penchant for pushing ill-conceived programs regardless of cost. Large numbers of urban doctors are now being transferred from the cities in response to Mao's instruction: "In medical and health work, put the stress on the rural areas." Official media have also extensively praised the contributions of "barefoot doctors" (peasants trained in rudimentary first aid work) in the countryside and bragged that more peasants than ever before are receiving expert medical attention. There is increasing evidence, however, that the

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newly available medical personnel are still too few and spread too thin to fulfill the claims made for them in offical propaganda.

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To a large degree, then, the primary aim of the costly reform programs at this stage appears social and political rather than economic. In the long run such extreme programs are bound to be self-defeating. In the wake of the Cultural Revolution, China urgently requires more systematic, effective planning to make better use of its existing and potential resources, but in many respects the Maoist programs seem to work in the opposite direction. The answer to many of the nation's basic problems appears to lie in a managerial revolution rather than in another round of political and social revolution.

PROSPECTS IN 1969

The policy debate within the regime is likely to continue during and after the ninth party congress. It increasingly appears that the leadership may enter and leave the congress still divided on key issues. If the congress confirms "conservative" provincial power holders and at the same time endorses Mao's radical policies, divisions within the leadership are likely to be widened, and many major issues—on which views are increasingly polarized—will be unresolved. Thus the immediate prospects are for continued pulling and hauling in which more pragmatic elements attempt to blunt Mao's initiative while his closest colleagues attempt to push his radical programs.

There is little likelihood that those leaders who are seeking to end the Cultural Revolution can initiate many positive programs of development as long as Mao retains his present capability for influencing the course of events. As a result, any successor regime to Mao's will have to cope with still enormous problems of reconstruction while attempting to rule a demoralized and possibly fractious nation. The prospects for a new regime's success will probably be directly in proportion to its ability to abandon Mao's revolutionary dogma in practice and to recognize that the contents of his latest programs have proved irrelevant to China's problems.

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